

All About

Learn the Greek Writing System

A large, thick blue circular arc that forms the left side of a circle, framing the number 2.

2

A large, thick blue circular arc that forms the right side of a circle, framing the text 'Grammar Points' and the number 2.

Grammar Points

2

Grammar Points

The Focus of This Lesson Is the Greek Writing System.

Greek has its own writing system using the Greek alphabet. The Greeks adapted their current writing system from the Phoenician alphabet.

Linguists believe that Greek originated from the Proto-Canaanite alphabet, which consisted of twenty-two acrophonic glyphs, dating all the way back to the Late Bronze Age (from about the fifteenth century B.C.). It is the first and oldest alphabet to use vowels. The Greek alphabet as it is known today emerged after the Greek Dark Ages (circa 1200 B.C.). Before that, the Greeks used a script called Linear B for several centuries, but it eventually died out with the fall of the Mycenaean civilization. The most notable change with the adaptation of the Phoenician alphabet was the introduction of vowel letters, without which Greek would be illegible.

Ionic Greek became the standard for Athens in 403 B.C., and as a result of Athens' vast influence, it slowly became the standard for all other Greek-speaking areas as well.

The direction in which Greek is written has evolved from its original right-to-left orientation to a back-and-forth, or boustrophedon, system in which each line is written in the opposite direction of the previous line. Sometime around 500 B.C., Greek adopted its current orientation of left-to-right writing.

The Greek alphabet is used today mainly in Greece and Cyprus, but it is also widely used within mathematics, astronomy, and science.

Alphabet

The Greek alphabet consists of twenty-four characters, of which seven are vowels and seventeen are consonants.

A α Άlfa

B β Víta
Γ γ Gámma
Δ δ Délta
Ε ε Épsilon
Ζ ζ Zíta
Η η Ítta
Θ θ Thíta
Ι ι Gióta
Κ κ Káppa
Λ λ Lámda
Μ μ Mi
Ν ν Ni
Ξ ξ Xi
Ο ο Ómikron
Π π Pi
Ρ ρ Ro
Σ σ ς Sígma
Τ τ Tay
Υ υ Ýpsilon
Φ φ Fi
Χ χ Chi
Ψ ψ Psi
Ω ω Oméga

3 Words are formed by combining a consonant letter and a vowel. The Greek language also forms words by using two-letter consonants, which together form one sound. Linguists assume that the two-letter consonants were introduced to the language to cover the lack of specific sounds such as [b], [d], and [g].

Just by knowing the Greek alphabet, you can survive in Greece because many words in English originate from Greek: this will allow you to survive with limited knowledge of the language. Furthermore, you will have an easier time understanding mathematics and science as they use the Greek alphabet.

Note

When writing in Greek, unlike English and other European languages that use a question mark ("?"), the Greek question mark is a semicolon (";") in English.

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We will be using the Greek question mark in our Greek examples. Now there will be no more confusion.